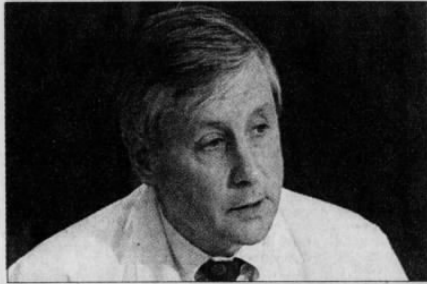


Mom in coma gives birth



High-risk case Obstetrician Dr. James Woods of Strong said, "Everything was fine; mother and baby were resting comfortably."

JIRO OSE staff photographer

Woman was raped; preemie boy healthy

By SUSAN J. SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The comatose woman who attracted worldwide attention when she was raped and made pregnant gave birth yesterday to a healthy — if premature — baby boy, Strong Memorial Hospital announced.

The birth should speed the police probe of her rape, because paternity can now be established more clearly. The rape occurred while the woman was a patient at Westfall Health Care Center, a Brighton nursing home. No one has been arrested but there are several suspects.

The baby, born nine weeks prematurely, weighed 2 pounds, 11

ounces and was 14 inches long, hospital officials said. Blood samples were drawn from the baby's umbilical cord for comparison with blood from suspects in the rape.

Doctors had planned to perform a Caesarean section on the mother the first week of May, near her due date. But early yesterday, around 4 a.m., nurses found the woman "quite agitated," said Dr. James Woods, a specialist in high-risk pregnancies and head of the team that delivered the baby.

Electronic monitors confirmed the mother was in labor, and she was rushed to the delivery room, where the baby was born at 5:15 a.m. It was a natural, vaginal delivery, Woods said.

FOCUS NOW ON SUSPECT 7A

"Obviously nature has a way of reminding us sometimes that labor is a natural process," the doctor said. Most babies can be delivered without pushing, he added.

Although the mother was agitated during delivery, Woods said that does not mean she was conscious of feeling pain.

The 29-year-old woman has been in a coma or, more accurately, a persistent vegetative state, since suffering head injuries in an automobile accident about 10 years ago. Because pregnant women with head

BABY, PAGE 7A

Baby

FROM PAGE 1A

injuries sometimes deliver prematurely, the woman had been closely monitored the past month.

"She was not capable of telling us her labor had started, so we had to watch her carefully," Woods said.

Woods praised the nurses who have cared for the woman since her admission to Strong Hospital Jan. 8. "It was an extraordinary challenge for them to constantly change her position and work with her family and the physicians," he said. "They get five stars for their efforts."

Unable to move on her own, the woman had to be turned to prevent the formation of blood clots. And she had to be watched for infections, such as those affecting the kidneys.

It was also a constant struggle to make sure she had adequate nutrition throughout her pregnancy, Woods said. Because of her condition, the woman is fed through a tube. "She gained weight, she lost and then broke even."

The infant came too quickly for the woman's parents to attend the delivery. They were notified by telephone afterward, Woods said.

"It was nice to tell them everything was fine, and mother and baby were resting comfortably."

The woman's parents could not be reached for comment last night.

The baby will remain in the neonatal intensive care unit of Children's Hospital at Strong for four to seven weeks, Woods said. No decision has been made on how long the mother will stay in the hospital or where she will go afterward, Strong officials said.

"I anticipate this baby is going to grow up and do just fine," Woods said. By today's standards, 31 weeks' gestation and 2 pounds, 11 ounces is a good preemie birth. Premies with the most problems are those under 2 pounds. The biggest danger is usually poor lung development, but this baby was breathing on his own, only needing supplemental oxygen, Woods said.

The mother had no apparent complications, the doctor said. "The patient looks very relaxed, and I guess I hope that she has some awareness of what's happened," he

added, referring to her son's birth.

Woods said he was touched by the "extraordinary way" the woman's family had supported her through her pregnancy.

"The family demonstrated a remarkable ability to come together, take on an enormous challenge and work through it," he said.

The family and the hospital also had to deal with a barrage of requests for interviews, from news organizations around the world. The *Today* show had already called the hospital yesterday evening.

Whoever takes custody of the baby most likely would have to apply to a court for legal guardianship, officials said. Applications can be filed in Family Court or Surrogate Court.

To protect their interests, the infant and the mother could be represented by separate lawyers.

There apparently is no legally required timetable for guardianship. But the sooner it is established the better, family law lawyers say. The Monroe County Department of Social Services intervenes only under certain circumstances: if a baby is abandoned, if there is evidence of risk of abuse or neglect or if the

mother is incompetent and has no family. None of these conditions appears to apply, a county official said. □

Includes reporting by staff writer Michael Wentzel.

The Glen Spring Get-A-

Letchworth State Park

- Overnight Accommodations at the Glen or Pinewood Lodge
- Dinner for Two
- Breakfast for Two

\$150 - \$185 per couple
taxes and gratuities included

Call for Reservations (716) 4

Package available Daily 4/5/96 thru 5/23/96 and Mid-Week (Monday - Thursday) 5/27/96 thru